
LINDSAY GRIFFIN & DAVID HAMILTON

Pakistan 1995

Thanks are due to Xavier Eguskitza, Taleh Mohammad and Asem Mustafa Awan for their help in providing information.

Last summer in the Karakoram was one of generally unsettled weather conditions. Intermittent bad weather was experienced from early June and a marked deterioration occurred from mid-August. The remnants of heavy snow cover from a late spring fall hampered early expeditions, while those arriving later experienced almost continuous precipitation. In spite of these difficulties there was an unusually high success rate on both the 8000m and lesser peaks. Pakistan Government statistics show that 59 expeditions from 16 countries received permits to attempt peaks above 6000m. Of the 29 expeditions to 8000m peaks 17 were successful. On the lower peaks 11 of the 29 expeditions succeeded. There were 14 fatalities (9 on 8000m peaks) among the 384 foreign climbers; a Pakistani cook and porter also died in separate incidents.

The action of the Pakistan Government in limiting the number of permits issued for each of the 8000m peaks to six per season has led to the practice of several unconnected expeditions 'sharing' a permit, an unfortunate development which may lead to complicated disputes with the Pakistani authorities in the future. Despite the growing commercialisation of high-altitude climbing, there were only four overtly commercial teams on the 8000m peaks (three on **Broad Peak** and one on **Gasherbrum II**). However, it is clear that many places on 'non-commercial' expeditions were filled by experienced climbers able to supply substantial funds from their own, or sponsors', resources.

As with 1986, it is likely that 1995 will be remembered for tragic accidents rather than for important ascents. There were, however, positive highlights to the season including new variations to existing lines on **Gasherbrum II** and **Nanga Parbat**, two new routes and an important free ascent on **Trango Tower**, an impressive repeat of the **Broad Peak** traverse, and an extreme ski and snowboard descent of **Gasherbrum I**.

K2 (8611m) The tragic events of 13 August overshadowed all other activities on the peak when six climbers from three different expeditions died close to the summit in freak weather conditions. In the immediate aftermath of that incident there was intense worldwide media interest focusing first on an imaginary avalanche explanation and later moving on to the perceived recklessness of the climbers involved. It later became clear from more informed sources, including other climbers who had been on **K2** and

Broad Peak at the time, that 'freak' hurricane-force winds had literally blown the six climbers off the mountain. Those who died were three Spanish members of an Aragon team led by Pepe Garcés (Javier Escartín, Javier Olivar, Lorenzo Ortiz), two members of a predominantly American expedition (the leader, Rob Slater, and the British climber Alison Hargreaves) and the New Zealander Bruce Grant from a multinational expedition led by Peter Hillary. At 6.30pm Olivar made a radio call stating that he had summited along with Hargreaves, Grant and Ortiz. They were about to descend and believed that Escartín and Slater were close to the summit and still moving slowly. No further communication was heard from any of this party and by 8pm Camp 4 was hit by exceptionally strong winds. In the ensuing storm several other climbers at lower camps were lucky to survive, in particular two Spaniards from the Aragon team whose tent had been destroyed at Camp 4. The following day the Canadian Jeff Lakes (a member of Hillary's expedition) died from exhaustion at Camp 2 after an epic descent from above Camp 4. There had been no advance warning of this wind storm as the weather on 13 August had seemed fine for a summit attempt. On the same day 18 people summited on nearby **Broad Peak** and were able to descend without incident.

There were seven expeditions to **K2** last summer, six on the Pakistan side and one from China. Eleven climbers from three expeditions summited, although six of these perished in the incident described above. There were three expeditions on the *Abruzzi Spur*: an American team led by Rob Slater, a Netherlands team led by Ronald Naar, and Peter Hillary's New Zealand/Canada/Australia group. On 17 July Alan Hinkes (UK) made the second British ascent with safe return of **K2** and the first British ascent with safe return of the *Abruzzi Spur*.* On the same day, Ronald Naar (NL) and Hans van der Meulen (NL) summited, along with two Pakistani high-altitude porters, Mehrban Shah and Rajab Shah.

The German Peter Kowalzik led a commercial team to attempt the 1982 *Japanese North Ridge route* from the Chinese side. The team made good progress and were unlucky to be defeated by bad weather at 8400m on the summit snowfield. On the Pakistan side of the mountain an American team led by Larry Hall attempted to repeat the 1991 *Béghin/Profit NW Ridge route*. Three members reached a high point of 8100m, meeting with the German North Ridge team before retreating. A strong Catalan team led by Josep Aced intended to make the second ascent of the *Cesen route* on the South Face. They arrived early in the season and suffered deep snow and unsettled weather. Despite this they established Camp 4 on the shoulder at 7800m (junction of the *Cesen route* and the *Abruzzi Spur*) on 4 July and made a lightweight summit bid the next day. This failed at 8300m. During the descent, when he was almost past the difficulties, Jordi Angles fell to his death. The Aragon team led by Pepe Garcés also chose the *Cesen route* and were able to make use of the fixed ropes left by the Catalans. They made very good progress and five of them were in Camp 4 at 7950m on the night

* The first and second British ascents of **K2** (sadly, without safe return) were made, via the *Abruzzi Spur*, by Alan Rouse and Julie Tullis in 1986. They perished on the descent.

of 12 August prior to their summit attempt. The following evening three members died after summiting in the incident described above.

Broad Peak (8047m) Although only six permits were issued there were eight teams on the mountain as a German, Canadian and Ukrainian team had agreed to 'share' one. Seven teams opted for the standard West Face route and all except the Ukrainians succeeded in reaching the main summit. A total of 25 climbers reached the summit by this route, including 18 on 13 August. There was one fatality on the peak when the South Korean Hyun-Jae slipped and fell on the descent after summiting. The most significant ascent of the season was the first repeat of the 1984 Kukuczka/Kurtyka traverse by a three-man Japanese team. T Hattori, T Kitamura and M Todaka traversed the North, Central and Main summits of Broad Peak in a six-day Alpine-style push, following the same schedule as the Polish first ascensionists.

Gasherbrum I (8068m) Six expeditions attempted the standard route via the *Japanese Couloir* on the North Face. A total of nine climbers from three expeditions summited. The highlight of the season's activity was the ski descent from the summit made by two Slovenians. Iztok Tomazin (on skis) and Marko Car (on snowboard) made the hardest technical ski descent ever attempted from the summit of an 8000m peak on 4/5 July, encountering steep sections of 50°/55° in the couloir which was only two metres wide in places. Three Spanish climbers from Jesus-Mari Lete's Basque team summited on 16 July. An unroped member of Jang Bong-Wan's South Korean team was seriously injured when he fell into a crevasse near Camp 1 on 19 July. He was rescued and evacuated by members of other expeditions on the mountain, some of whom were also injured in the process. The Korean team gave up their attempt after reaching a high point of 7300m. Czech and American teams were also unsuccessful, reaching only 7000m in the deteriorating late-season weather. A large Tibetan expedition including a number of very experienced foreign climbers received special permission to attempt both **GI** and **GII**. After placing 13 members on the summit of **GII** (details below) they turned their attention to **GI**. None of the Tibetan climbers succeeded but Ed Viesturs (USA), Carlos Carsolio (Mexico), Krzysztof Wielicki (Poland) and Jacek Berbeka (Poland) summited on 15 July.

Gasherbrum II (8035m) There were seven teams on the mountain, all tackling the standard 1956 *Austrian SW Spur route*. Only three of the expeditions were successful, putting a total of 18 climbers on top. These included 12 members of the Tibetan Alpine Club expedition: eight Tibetans and the four listed above as **GI** summiters. All 12 ascended by the standard route, except Carsolio who broke away from the group at 7400m to solo a previously unclimbed line on the WSW face. Rob Hall (NZ), who was unwell, returned at c7700. The other successes on the mountain were the Swiss pair Dieter Porsche and Josef Wangelger (who summited on 17 June) and four Pakistani members of a joint military expedition including Jawad

Pirzada, the expedition leader, who summited on 7 July. Two German teams and one each from Austria and Japan were unsuccessful.

Gasherbrum IV (7925m) The extremely difficult and dangerous West Face of **GIV** has not been attempted since the Kurtyka/Schauer first ascent in 1985. This year two separate expeditions hoped to climb a new route up the Central Spur of this face. The legendary Slovenian climber Slavko Sveticic intended to make the most audacious ascent in the history of Himalayan climbing with an Alpine-style solo ascent. In complete contrast a 14-man South Korean team led by Cho Sung-Dae planned a more traditional ascent. Sveticic climbed part way up the NW ridge to cache equipment for his descent before attempting the West Face. Climbing by night and resting during the day he reached 7100m in two days before encountering bad weather and heavy snowfall. Two days later, on 19 June, he radioed to Base Camp that he was about to retreat. Nothing further was heard from him and it is thought that he fell to his death soon after this. The Korean group gave up on the West Face, deciding that it was too dangerous after reaching a high point of 6400m on 12 July. Two members then attempted the NW ridge reaching 7800m before retreating with frostbite.

Trango Tower (6237m) This hugely impressive granite spire attracted no fewer than five expeditions, more than any other sub-8000m peak. Four of these teams were successful with two of them establishing important new routes and another making a very impressive free ascent. A USA team led by Eric Brand put up a difficult new route on the NE face. All four climbers summited on 4 August after a 20-day capsule-style push using portaledge. They graded the ascent as VII, A4 with rock at 5.10b and ice at W14. A five-man Basque team led by Miguel Zabalza split into two groups. Three climbers made a repeat ascent of the 'standard' *Slovenian route* in seven days, summiting on 7 July. Two others (Julián Beraza and Txema Ruiz) succeeded in climbing a new route on the 1200m NW face in two weeks giving it a grade of F6a and A3. An American team featuring Todd Skinner was successful in creating the most difficult free ascent in the Karakoram to date. They chose the 1988 *Kurtyka/Loretan East Face route* and over a 60-day period worked at freeing each of the 29 individual pitches, whilst making a major 300m variation in the middle section of the route. They graded one pitch at 5.13, two at 5.12d, two at 5.10c, and many others at 5.12 and 5.11 (all four climbers summited although only Skinner made a 'free' ascent). A four-man UK team intending to climb on the N face had to change their plans as two of the above parties were already in place. Instead they made an ascent of the Slovenian route, with Wainwright and Pritchard summiting on 13 August (see *MEF Reports*, ref. 95/12). The all-female UK team of Bull, Claridge, Phillips and Westrupp, aiming to climb the *Slovenian route*, was defeated by a combination of poor weather and time constraints (see *MEF Reports*, ref. 95/16). A strong four-man Spanish team failed to climb the neighbouring 1000m high SE face of **Uli Biaho (6083m)**. Further south in the Charakusa glacier (off the Hushe valley) a

seven-person USA team led by Angela Hawse failed on another big wall objective: the 1200m N face of **P 6190** after suffering sustained bad weather. Also in the Hushe area, seven Italians led by Oreste Forno failed in their attempt to make the first 'official' ascent of the superb spire of **Laila (6096m)** above the left bank of the Gondokoro glacier.

Two teams from the USA attempted **Masherbrum (7821m)**. Gary Wilmot's group approached from the north aiming to make the second ascent of the 1984 *Austrian route*. Alan Scott Moore's expedition opted for the southerly approach to the original 1960 *American SE face route*. Neither were successful. An Italian expedition led by Livio Intini intended to climb **Skil Brum (7360m)** on the Pakistan/China border 8km west of **K2**. This peak does not seem to have been climbed since the first ascent by Austrians in 1957. However, this year's attempt failed in the poor late-season weather. A UK team led by Rob Dawson attempted **Bobisghir (6416m)** in September (see *MEF Reports, ref. 95/21*).

The two big technical peaks of the Biafo glacier were each visited by one expedition. The South Pillar of **Baintha Brakk (7285m)** was attempted by two young French Alpinists, Jean Annequin and Pascal Chataing. This route has not yet been completed to the summit but the rock pillar was successfully climbed by another French party in 1983. The complete ascent proved to be beyond the reach of the lightweight tactics employed by this year's team and they reluctantly retreated from c6400m having climbed the rock pillar, the hardest part of the route. A strong German team led by Jan Mersch attempted to force a new route up the 800m 'big wall' on the SW face of **Latok 2 (7151m)**, but were unsuccessful.

A five-man British team led by Dave Wilkinson made the first ascent of the snow and ice pyramid **Haramosh II (6666m)** south of the Chogo Lungma glacier. The entire party summited on 6 August, but during the descent Paul Nunn and Geoff Tier were killed by a sérac fall within a few hundred metres of their top camp (see *MEF Reports, ref. 95/24*). Doug Scott described the accident as follows: 'On 6 August Paul Nunn and Geoff Tier were descending from the summit of Haramosh II, in the Karakoram range, when they were overwhelmed by a massive icefall collapse and were buried. Three other members of the same expedition had already returned safely from the summit that day – Dave Wilkinson, Brian Davison and Colin Wells. They were within earshot of Nunn and Tier. They would have all been safely back in Base Camp if that ice had broken a few minutes before or after. This accident was sheer bad luck, for these men were not driven to take undue risks. They were there for the sheer fun of climbing ...'

A four-man Japanese expedition to **Kunyang Kish (7852m)** led by K Tobita was unsuccessful, as was Kim Yo-Hung's four-man South Korean team attempting the unclimbed N face of **Lupghar Sar (7200m)**. Two groups attempted **Spantik (7027m)** by the normal SE ridge route. Five Swiss led by Martin Settler failed in June owing to deep snow and attendant avalanche risk. Five French climbers also failed in late August owing to bad weather.

A five-man Columbian expedition led by Volker Stallbohm made an impressive ascent of the NW ridge of **Rakaposhi (7788m)**. The summit was reached in a solo push by Anibal Pineda making only the third ascent of this route.

Nanga Parbat (8125m) was visited by five expeditions. The most popular line for recent ascents, the *Kinshofer route* on the Diamir face, was attempted without success by three teams. Italians led by Oscar Piazza, Japanese led by Tadakiyo Sakahara, and three Canadians led by Peter Spriceniaks, all seem to have failed at a high point of 6800m. The only success of the season came on 23 July when Hiroshi Sakai, Yukio Abe and Takeshi Akiyama, members of a 10-strong Japanese expedition, reached the summit via a variation of the original 1953 *Rakhiot Flank route*. Doug Scott led his third attempt on the 12km-long Mazeno Ridge with a strong UK/Polish/Australian expedition but was defeated by a combination of illness, lack of time and the sheer scale of the route (see *MEF Reports*, ref. 95/17).

Despite a reputation for stable weather, particularly early in the season, the Hindu Kush has been visited infrequently by mountaineers in recent years. 1995 saw four expeditions attempt the area's highest and third highest peaks. **Tirich Mir (7708m)** was successfully climbed by a total of seven climbers from three expeditions. All followed the most popular line of ascent, the 1967 *Czech NW ridge route*. On 7 July Ayumi Nozawai summited with two Japanese companions after a lightweight push in five days from Base Camp. David Hamilton (UK) and Grant Dixon (Australia) reached the top on 17 July, three of their companions (Stephan Fuller, Geraldine Goldsmith and Phil Wickens) having turned back at 7350m. A South Korean expedition led by Lee Hae-Bong met with triumph and tragedy on 24 July when Kim Jae-Poo and Cho Jung-Hung summited in the early evening but fell to their deaths while descending. An Austrian group led by Reinhold Stauber succeeded in climbing the complex massif of **Istor-O-Nal (7403m)** on 26 July, making the second ascent of the 1971 *Yugoslav route*. The highest peak in the neighbouring Hindu Raj, **Buni Zom (6551m)**, was attempted unsuccessfully by a Japanese team under the leadership of Kiyokatsu Saito during August.

Accurate details of climbing activity on sub-6000m peaks is more difficult to collect as this information is not recorded by the Pakistan authorities. A four-man team made a probable third ascent of the original West Ridge route on **Shani (5800m)** (see *MEF Reports*, ref. 95/41).

At least six teams attempted the elegant granite spire of **Bubulimotin (c6000m)** above Karimabad in the Hunza valley. A German pair failed on the original 1982 *French route* from the Ultar glacier, while on the opposite side of the mountain three more small groups (Australians, New Zealanders, and Italians), approaching the 1991 *Swedish route* from the Hasanabad glacier, were also unsuccessful. On the impressive SE face a small Anglo-American team failed, while a large Japanese group used siege tactics to climb a new route on the 1000m wall.